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The Arabian

# Sun

# One Vision, One Stadium, One Year

# One Vision, One S

## *Faced with an accelerated deadline, a Project Management Team from Saudi Ar*



The 60,000-plus seat King Abdullah Sports City stadium cuts an impressive image inside as well as outside.

**EAMONN HOUSTON**

**JIDDAH —** Many an eyebrow was raised in disbelief when it emerged that a 62,400-person world-class stadium would be built as part of a sports city just north of Jiddah in the space of just a year. It couldn't be done, was the common thought. But as the clock ticks down to the inauguration of King Abdullah Sports City (KASC) and the lush green grass of its focal point stadium prepares to host its first football cup final and an opening show, the likes of which has never been seen in Saudi Arabia. For the team tasked with overcoming the "impossible," 2013 was a year they will never forget.

It was in 2009 that the government of Saudi Arabia assigned Saudi Aramco the task of constructing a state-of-the-art sports city on the northern edge of the Red Sea coastal city of Jiddah.

### *The vision of a King*

The Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz, had a vision, a vision that identified sports as a crucial part of the Saudi social fabric for the future.

He stated, "In recognition of the importance of sports, its benefits and role in the progress of humanity, and out of keenness for the welfare of Saudi youths, we have decided to establish the King Abdullah Sports City."

Ground was broken for the stadium in 2012 but, toward the end of that year, it became clear that the iconic sports stadium would be required to be built in the space of only one year.

Today, an army of workers is applying the finishing touches on the stadium for the inauguration while troupes of Saudi performers rehearse the movements of a spectacular opening show that will place Jiddah on the world stage. Teams of technical and creative professionals from the Kingdom and around the world are putting the final touches on costumes and choreography and overseeing the installation of seemingly endless technical connections.

From the air, the KASC stadium looks like a starfish in the desert, its arterial entrances fanning out from a huge, impressive bowl. Soon the Jiddah skyline will be illuminated by the sounds of sport, the sounds of happiness and the sounds of booming fireworks. It is complete.

The story of the journey of how this all came to be is one of a "never say never" attitude, fortitude and innovation in the face of seemingly insurmountable hurdles, an incessant determination to succeed and a burning pride in a nation.



Ramiz Al-Habib



Sameer Al-Dhamen



Abdulaziz Almodhi

### *Overcoming the impossible*

When Ramiz Al-Habib was growing up in the Eastern Province, he could never have foreseen that one day he would be charged with overseeing a team delivering an iconic sports project that would be a catalyst for a King's vision for the development and well-being of his nation. Giving youth an inspirational outlet for their development was central to that vision.

The Eastern Province was developed and grew in tandem with Saudi Aramco. Al-Habib's maternal grandfather served in the company for 25 years; his father for 40 years.

Al-Habib is now in his 32nd year of service with Saudi Aramco.

But 32 years down the line, Al-Habib's energy and enthusiasm for his job burn as bright as the day he started work at Saudi Aramco.

His office is adorned with large photographic images of the KASC project at various stages of development. Directly behind him, a dramatic panorama of the stadium's interior, shows the sun breaking through the canopy of its roof, illuminating the pitch and stadium below.

For Al-Habib, 2013 was a milestone of great magnitude. He is eager to talk about a team that, against the odds, has delivered a stadium of which any nation in the world would be proud.

KASC was a complete departure from the Saudi Aramco Project Management Team's usual work. Massive oil and gas projects are commissioned and completed far from the public glare. The work is always ongoing. A stadium, by contrast, is public by its very nature.

He describes it as the "most challenging of projects."

It was to become even more challenging in November 2012 when instructions came that the project was to be accelerated to be ready one year ahead of schedule and completed by the end of November 2013. It was often repeated, but it really was a case of overcoming the impossible.

Al-Habib recalls the KASC journey, its peaks and valleys, and the raft of challenges it presented along the way on a daily basis.

"When I was assigned to lead this project, I came from an oil and gas environment," he says. "This was the first time for me to build something like this, a stadium. Later on, the difficult part was finishing it in one year. I was just learning about building a





After only a year, Saudi Aramco has brought to the skyline north of Jiddah the King Abdullah Sports City stadium, an

# tadium, One Year

## ramco delivered a turnkey world-class stadium to the Kingdom in just one year.

stadium; it was a very challenging task to finish in one year."

The accelerated deadline begged for a complete overhaul of the approach, and with that, daily deadlines and rapid construction milestones while maintaining quality and, crucially, safety.

A workable and flexible plan had to be developed, and challenges and obstacles had to be responded to instantly. Quite simply, on this project, there was no room to put anything on a back burner.

The new accelerated project plan saw dramatic strides in construction. The first, and probably the biggest, challenge came in the form of concrete. Consider the pouring of 154,000 cubic meters of concrete by May 2013. Consider the manpower demands, rebar supply and steel erecting. The task would have been intimidating to any project management team in the world.

Manpower was doubled in a one-month period between December 2012 and January 2013.

The progress had to be tangible with a clear-cut way of delivering noticeable progress for each follow-up visit by Saudi Aramco management, including the president and CEO. It was with this relentless methodology that the KASC stadium sprung from the sands of Jiddah in record time.

### *Fatherly support*

Al-Habib and his team needed support, and it came from a variety of angles, including some words of encouragement from his father.

"Every weekend, I would call my father. My father is a sports fan, a sportsman in his life. He was a source of encouragement. He said, 'You are doing this for your country, you will do it right, and you will focus.'

"So that was one of the things that sustained me. Love of my job was the No. 1 thing that kept me going. It was great that everyone was excited — all of them, everyone including contractors, Aramcons, vendors on the outside — everybody was excited to make it happen, and I got a lot of support from my boss and my boss's boss and my CEO."

Al-Habib pays tribute to the man he calls his boss, Motaz Al Mashouk, general manager of Public Service Project Management at Saudi Aramco.

He also singles out Khalid G. Al-Buainian, senior vice president of Technical Services, and Fahad E. Al-Helal, vice president of Project Management.

Al-Habib describes Khalid A. Al-Falih as a tower of strength and a source of support and guidance.

"The CEO was instrumental. He was a frequent visitor to the site for inspections and progress," Al-Habib says. "He was everywhere at every milestone, he knew everything that we were doing, he knew our difficulties. He shared in our challenges; he was with us, and he was also excited and happy about our progress."

Al-Habib looks at the stadium picture on the wall behind him. He smiles.

"I feel happy, extremely happy. It is an accomplishment. It is extremely satisfying."

When he reflects on 2013, there is an air of pride about how everything was accomplished.

"The stadium — 2013 was almost like being on a fast train — I will never forget it, in my entire life."

Interest in the iconic sports project is huge and comes from a cross-section of the Saudi Arabian public. Already, even before its turnstiles have started turning, it is symbolic of national unity, firing the imaginations of the young, the old, male and female, the able-bodied and the disabled. Some 311 seats and four elevators on ground level cater for the latter, in a first for Saudi Arabian stadiums.

Project management is a learning cycle, but with the stadium, the project management team learned much on how to do things and about how to deal with people and government agencies.

### *"We made it."*

Sameer Al-Dhamen, senior project manager with the Main Stadium Construction Division, travelled the KASC journey alongside Ramiz Al-Habib. Al-Dhamen has Saudi Aramco coursing through his veins. From the Eastern Province, his late father was a superintendent in the company's Marine Department and served in Saudi Aramco for 35 years. His two elder brothers both served their time in the company and he has one younger brother who remains an employee.

Al-Dhamen's expression when he speaks about the accelerated KASC program says it all: he relishes a challenge and, like Al-Habib, is extremely proud of the achievement.

He had just finished a November 2012 vacation when he got the call to travel to Dhahran and was asked to join the project.

"I told them that I love this kind of project," he beams.

"I have always described this challenge as one like a marriage and delivering a child safely to birth. The accelerated project was the highlight of my career, to be put under pressure like that. I loved that challenge."

Al-Dhamen said the team had to work almost relentlessly in order to meet the project milestones — weekends and vacations were consigned to memory.

"I was exposed to a lot of challenges and problems — this was a mega-project with a critical schedule ahead and the most prestigious I have worked on. I will always be proud of it. I will always remember it. Last year, my family got a break from me. This is what I do, this is what I like. I take calculated decisions, and I learned a lot from this project. It was an experience and a challenge at the same time."

### *At the center of a project*

Abdulaziz Almodhi joined the KASC Project Management Team in December 2012, just when it became clear that the facility would have to be completed in a one-year time frame.

He joined as a project manager and quickly became the point man for the Inauguration Team, the Project Management Team and government agencies.

Almodhi's role ensured that shipments of materials arrived on time, that matters were closed with water and electricity agencies and that visas were granted expeditiously to workers from other countries.

"It was a challenge to get the shipments here so quickly and delivered onto the site in no time. We worked very hard as a team, Ramiz, Sameer and I, and we dealt with very real challenges. We worked together to develop different strategies to fit each situation and environment."

When he sees the finished stadium today, just days before its official inauguration by King Abdullah, he is filled with pride.

"I am very proud that I can take my kids there; it is such a beautiful stadium. I know we got tired and had many challenges during the project, but to achieve what has been achieved carries us, and the vision of the King encouraged us even more," he says.

"We received great support from Saudi Aramco management and the CEO. That gave us the motivation and I met so many people from so many areas of the company and the government and from everywhere. At the moment, I am working with the Inauguration Team to ensure that everything goes smoothly on the inauguration evening; I look forward to a very successful opening ceremony and seeing the King there," Almodhi adds.

Soon, the achievement of these men and their team will be appreciated by all of Saudi Arabia.



- Exceptional engineering and project management have been the hallmarks of the KASC project. From the moment Saudi Aramco was given the task of building the monumental 60,000-plus capacity arena, it was all about teamwork and leadership. President and CEO Khalid A. Al-Falih steered the alignment of the whole organization behind the project and its ambitious one-year target. The aggressive timetable required non-negotiable deadlines and objectives as management across the company supported the effort. The project's strategies and plans were constantly reviewed to ensure that they were robust and capable of dealing with obstacles and challenges. Saudi Aramco's KASC project team counted on management to make the right decisions at the right time and was able to beat their deadlines thanks to great engineering feats and project management skills.

***Civil Construction***
- 154,000 cubic meters of concrete poured
- Pre-cast: 20,000 cubic meters
- Block works: 37,000 square meters

***Mechanical***
- HVA ducts: 22,000 meters
- Chilled water piping: 6,600 meters
- Mechanical piping: 61,000 meters

***Steel***
- 7,000 tons

***Electrical***
- Electrical wiring: 11,000 meters
- Electrical cables: 79,000 meters

***Finishing***
- Flooring: 70,000 square meters
- Walls: 42,000 square meters
- Spectator seats: 62,400





impressive landmark that signals the company's expertise in mega-project construction.

# Built for safety



## Crowd safety a priority for KASC inauguration ceremony and cup final

**EAMONN HOUSTON**

**JIDDAH —** World-class crowd management systems are in place to ensure the safe passage for tens of thousands of spectators to and from the King Abdullah Sports City (KASC) during the auspicious inauguration ceremony to herald its opening tomorrow (May 1, 2014).

The stadium inauguration — just north of Jiddah — will see the final of the King's Cup played out before a capacity crowd and a spectacular hi-tech opening ceremony showcasing performances and artistic scenes.

World-class expertise has been enlisted to ensure that the event will take place as smoothly and safely as possible.

Saudi Aramco, which built KASC, is emphasizing safety in keeping with its approach to its daily oil and gas operations.

A team of Saudi Aramco security experts and consultants are in Jiddah and have finalized a crowd management plan for the evening.

The opening ceremony and match will be all-ticket with specific seat allocations within the grounds.

Seat allocations and stadium and parking zones will be clearly displayed on all of the tickets issued. The tickets will also show a plan of the stadium printed on the back, providing clear information on where spectators should go.

An Event Control Center will employ state-of-the-art CCTV equipment to monitor the safety of all entering the stadium and the performance of venue safety systems. The Center will be a communications hub for an army of stewards hired to ensure that the inauguration is a success.



At the Event Control Center, state-of-the-art CCTV equipment helps monitor the safety of all people entering the stadium.

More than 1,000 trained stewards, managed by a chief steward, will oversee queue management, ticket validation, circulation and crowd management, ushering, issue reporting, spectator information points and lost and found. The stewards will be identified by their high-visibility items of clothing. They will also act as way finders for spectators entering the stadium.

Large and highly visible signage has been installed at all spectator areas, both inside and outside the stadium including clear safety signs showing emergency escape points, first aid stations, warnings and the locations of firefighting equipment.

Plans of the grounds will also be clearly visible at key locations in the stadium, as will its regulations and information on prohibited items.

Gate numbers, level numbers, row and seat numbers will be clearly displayed to ensure convenient entry for the spectators. There are six spectator entrances to the stadium and 100 ticket validation lanes.

### Spectator security in and around the ground

Mamdouh S. Al-Aseeri is the Security team's leader at the KASC site, while Omar A. Al-Hazmi is the superintendent of the Security Operation in Jiddah.

Both from the city, the two feel an immense sense of pride at the opportunity to play a role in this civil project. And it is a crucial role.



Mamdouh S. Al-Aseeri



Omar A. Al-Hazmi

"We are here to serve all of the spectators," says Al-Aseeri, "We have good skills at dealing with the public. For the inauguration we have implemented a plan that will help everything run smoothly.

"Our aim is about enabling the spectators to get into the stadium as easily as possible and to make sure that they have sufficient information to be able to get to their seats and enjoy the inauguration event and the match and ensure that they have all of the access they need to amenities including food, toilets, etc.

"We also want to ensure that spectators can exit in a timely fashion. What we also do is have a major focus on safety and we aim to ensure that at each stage of the spectator journey we plan for unforeseen incidents and the unlikely event of an emergency. We have contingencies in place and we are able to deal with any incidents with the least impact on spectators."

Al-Aseeri is continually works together with government security forces as the event nears, among them the Royal Guard.

Al-Hazmi said Saudi Aramco Industrial Security will be relying on its deep reserves of expertise to ensure a safe and spectacular inauguration ceremony.

"Our security men are highly trained and undergo a comprehensive training process to be on the ground. They are experienced, whether it is in Saudi Aramco's normal operations, ceremonies or inaugurations like this one. We are using all of our resources and expertise so that spectators on the evening can have a very safe and enjoyable evening.

"We are not too tough and we are not weak. We strike a balance; our men are very professional. We know, for our people, the spectators, this is a dream, the vision of our leader, and it has become a reality. We want them to enjoy the match and the party and hope that they remember it forever," Al-Hazmi says.




Photos by Musleh Khathami and Mahdi Al-Ali/MPD